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CITY OF SEATTLE
MAYOR'S OFFICE

April 3, 2012

Mayor Mike McGinn
County Executive Dow Constantine
Members of Seattle City Council
Members of King County Council

Re: Proposed NBA/NHL Arena

Dear Mayor McGinn, Executive Constantine, and Members of the Seattle City Council and King County Council,

Much has already been said and written in the media about the proposed new arena for a possible NBA and/or NHL team. Unfortunately, that has also included inaccurate speculation about the position of the Seattle Mariners on this proposal. For that reason, I thought it important that I clarify the view of the Seattle Mariners.

We strongly support the return of the NBA to Seattle, and would welcome the addition of an NHL hockey team. We are fans of all sports. It is our strongly held belief that professional sports are important to the fabric of the community, and that Seattle is a vibrant sports market that will benefit from the addition of basketball and hockey. We do not believe that adding NBA and NHL teams, in an appropriately located venue, will harm the existing professional teams.

Site selection for a new NBA/NHL arena is an important regional decision. Getting the siting right is critical to the success of the new arena. When the Mariners worked with King County and the publicly appointed landlord to plan a new ballpark in 1995-96, the site of Safeco Field was chosen following a year-long public process that considered four or five alternative locations in King County. The site was not dictated by the Mariners, or by any single interest.

We were well-served by the extensive site review and selection process, and believe a new NBA team would be equally well-served by a detailed examination of alternative arena sites, rather than prematurely locking in on a single location. The decision on a new arena will be one the community will have to live with for 30 years or more. It is only reasonable that you take the time to do it right, examining all alternatives consistent with SEPA requirements. There is absolutely no urgency to lock in on a single site immediately.

Cities and neighborhoods like Bellevue, Renton, Seattle Center, South Lake Union and others should all be given careful consideration as a potential home for the new arena. Regardless of which site is ultimately chosen, this needs to be a thoughtful public process that balances the preference of one investor with all of the region's important commercial, transportation, and maritime interests, as well as the long-term interests of the region's fans.



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The proposed SODO location, in our view, simply does not work. It would bring scheduling, traffic and parking challenges that would likely require hundreds of millions of dollars to mitigate. We doubt that an arena could succeed financially at this location, given mitigation costs and necessary scheduling limitations. Without highly restrictive scheduling limitations, traffic gridlock would put all of the area's teams at risk. The Mariners work closely with the Seahawks and Sounders to keep conflicting events to a bare minimum because we see first hand just how stressed SODO is by the influx of sports fans to the venues. We have learned the hard way that overlapping events at two facilities do not work. They produce a very poor fan experience, and traffic gridlock for area businesses.

This is why City permit conditions imposed on Safeco Field and CenturyLink Field prohibit major events from being held concurrently, and require a 4-hour window between the end of one and the start of the next. These conditions also restrict weekday start times, and limit us to six weekday day games per season.

Adding an arena at the same location will only compound this scheduling problem. We do not know if the city will allow a new arena to hold events that overlap with events at the existing facilities but assume that some may be unavoidable, knowing the NBA and NHL schedules and hearing talk of concert and other event business. Any arena event that overlapped with either a Safeco Field or CenturyLink event would, without extensive mitigation, create traffic gridlock, paralyze area businesses, and require over 7,000 parking spaces that do not exist today.

We have seen a dramatic increase of traffic, and loss of parking in this neighborhood over the past twelve years. Terminal 46 has become one of the West Coast's busiest container terminals, with truck traffic that often backs up to the freeway ramps. I-90 traffic has increased dramatically with the tolling of SR-520, creating evening rush hour backups on Edgar Martinez Drive. Game day traffic coming in on I-90 already backs up onto the freeway prior to most games. And we have 3300 fewer parking spaces in the neighborhood than when we moved into Safeco Field in 1999.

Occidental Street, which the proposed arena would close, has become an active thoroughfare relieving the congestion on First Avenue. Roughly 30% of the cars entering and leaving our garage use the stretch of Occidental Street that is proposed for closure. First Avenue cannot handle this volume.

If after an inclusive process to select the best possible site for a new arena the decision is that SODO is the best location, then the Mariners stand ready to work with the City, the County, and with Chris Hansen's group on finding ways to address these difficult challenges. No one has more experience with these issues than we do. It is because of that experience that we strongly believe there are better sites for an arena than in SODO.

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I hope that this letter helps clarify our position. We strongly support the return of the NBA to the Seattle area. But we have strong reservations about the SODO site for an arena. We believe that the interests of all citizens, especially our sports fans, would be better served if there was an established public process to select the best possible arena site.

If you would like more information from the Mariners, or want to involve us further in the process, we would welcome that. The best person to contact here is Bart Waldman, our Executive Vice President, Legal & Governmental Affairs. Bart was involved in the entire process of siting and financing Safeco Field, and also oversees our transportation planning and coordination of event scheduling with CenturyLink Field and Events Center.

Thank you for your enthusiasm for professional sports, and for your leadership in making sure that the interests of all of the region's citizens and businesses are properly protected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'H. Lincoln', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Howard Lincoln
Chairman and CEO

cc: Advisory Review Panel Co-Chairs Jan Drago and Lenny Wilkens
Washington State Major League Baseball Stadium Public Facilities District Board